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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KE](#)
SUBJECT: OBAMA DISCUSSES CORRUPTION AND TRIBAL POLITICS
WITH OPPOSITION LEADER

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre for reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: During an August 25 meeting with Senator Obama, Official Leader of the Opposition Uhuru Kenyatta predicted that ethnicity would dominate the 2007 national elections. While he stressed that his party, KANU, would strive to move beyond ethnic politics, he feared that the electorate would largely continue to vote according to tribal affiliations. Kenyatta encouraged the Obama to reinforce to Kenyans the importance of good governance and nationalism while challenging the Senator to hold him accountable to his professed commitment to reform. End Summary.

12. (U) During the meeting held at his office, Uhuru Kenyatta, Leader of the Official Opposition, who was joined by Chief Whip Honorable Justin Muturi and Shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs Marsden Madoka, warmly welcomed the visitors and emphasized KANU's desire to continue developing U.S.-Kenya relations. Kenyatta expressed enthusiasm about future visits from the Senator and his colleagues in Congress, as well as continuing a dialogue with the new U.S. Ambassador to Kenya. Senator Obama was accompanied by General J. Scott Gration, Mark Lippert, Commander Edson, Ambassador Ranneberger, and USAID's Democracy and Governance Officer (note taker).

Kenyatta: Kibaki's "Poaching" Undermines Democracy

13. (C) Kenyatta emphasized that the President's failure to honor the power sharing agreement among the NARC coalition parties bred mistrust among the coalition members. He claimed that the President's response to the coalition's disintegration also was telling. Rather than addressing the underlying issues, the President attempted to strengthen his own position by trying to dismantle KANU. According to Kenyatta, the President's strategy was simple. He offered individual KANU members of parliament (MPs) cabinet positions. Kibaki's approach, Kenyatta opined, not only actively undermines political parties and their role in a multi-party democracy, but it is unconstitutional under Kenya's Westminster parliamentary system. Kenyatta further remarked that KANU's legal suit challenging the poaching of KANU MPs for ministerial posts as unconstitutional faced repeated delays. Unfortunately, he explained, rather than ruling on its merits, the constitutional court has continually deferred the case. Kenyatta believes this

tactic, clear evidence of the executive's continuing ability to influence the less than independent judiciary, will continue to be employed until national elections are held in late 2007.

No Viable Alternative But To Unite With ODM

¶4. (C) In response to Senator Obama's query about KANU's current strategy, Kenyatta began with a discussion of the recent by-elections. He characterized them as worse than elections under the Moi regime (i.e., under his own party, KANU), alleging blatant misuse of government resources, improper use of relief food, government sponsored violence, and government threats to remove the national security apparatus in constituencies if the government did not win the election. Even under these conditions, KANU won two of the five contested seats. (NOTE: Embassy election observers noted some of these abuses, but in general found the by-elections well run and the results credible. END NOTE.) However, shortly after the by-elections, Kenyatta claimed, the President attempted to entice the newly elected KANU MPs to decamp and join government (so far unsuccessfully).

¶5. (C) Since the spirit of free and fair elections has not yet rooted itself, explained Kenyatta, the only way to oppose the sitting government is to unite with other parties. Thus, KANU has joined the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) (NOTE: ODM was a loose coalition formed to defeat the GOK-sponsored draft constitution in the 2005 referendum. Its members recently submitted an application to register it as a proper political party, under the name ODM-Kenya. END NOTE.) Kenyatta noted that this was a gamble for KANU, but if ODM could hold together, Kibaki would have difficulties being

re-elected. He further commented that the current state of affairs was particularly sad, explaining that in the run up to the 2002 election there was unity among the political parties in getting rid of "Moi" (i.e., KANU). However, he complained, now the discourse is increasingly focused on ethnicity.

Ethnic Polarization Rather than Issues-Based Campaigns

¶6. (C) Acknowledging that "Kenyatta" is a "good Kikuyu name," Kenyatta observed that the ethnic discourse places him in an even more difficult position. He further articulated his grave concern that ethnic polarization could unravel Kenya. He stated that he will not permit himself to be pulled into that process and KANU will do all it can to avoid further polarization. He added that the advent of ethnic based radio broadcasting was exacerbating the situation. For example, during the referendum, in his home area talk radio conveyed the message that a vote against the draft constitution was a vote to send Kibaki home and Raila would become president, a message designed to strike fear into the hearts of Kikuyus. He further commented that stringent licensing requirements allow the government to unduly influence radio ownership, the communication medium with the greatest influence and reach.

¶7. (C) Reflecting on the deteriorating infrastructure, Senator Obama asked why there was no public works scheme where buildings and roads could be developed while creating employment. Obama noted that people across ethnic lines must be frustrated with corruption and rising insecurity. He asked whether there was a significant Kikuyu base that has not benefited from the current patronage-based politics. He suggested that a strong party platform on anti-corruption and reducing insecurity would be compelling.

¶8. (C) Kenyatta agreed that the current corruption scandals and crime are not good for the incumbents and that citizens are dissatisfied with the GOK response to these issues. He noted that the positive economic growth Kenya has experienced over the past year failed to create significant employment opportunities. Furthermore, the GOK policies on cleaning up the streets (removing unlicensed market stalls, etc.)

aggravated unemployment rates. As the GOK "cleaned the streets," members of the informal sector, the largest single employer, lost their livelihoods and crime intensified. KANU maintained that there should have been a clear policy outlining employment alternatives before such a cleanup began. Kenyatta further reasoned that the lack of a public works program was directly related to corruption.

¶9. (C) Kenyatta agreed with the Senator's assessment of underserved Kikuyus, noting that they were KANU's intended target, and that it is high time to stop ethnic-based patronage politics. However, he emphasized that the final question is whether, when the chips are down, the electorate will focus on substantive issues or revert to ethnic considerations.

True Friends Tell Each Other When They're Naked

¶10. (C) In closing the meeting, Senator Obama noted the importance of ensuring that his efforts are not perceived as meddling, and he highlighted that he is meeting with both opposition and government leaders. He also reinforced the important link between ethnic based political patronage and corruption. As long as people think patronage is the key to advancement their entrepreneurial spirit will be underutilized. Kenyatta reiterated that his biggest disappointment in President Kibaki was his failure to consolidate the gains made in 2002 when the electorate voted for a president regardless of ethnicity. According to Kenyatta, Kibaki reversed that gain and ethnic polarization is on the rise. Kenyatta underscored that, by his ancestry, Senator Obama is influential. He implored the Senator to communicate a message that government should be about ideas, policies, and programs, noting that it is on that basis that Senator Obama was elected and it is on that basis that Kenya can become a great country.

¶11. (C) On a lighter, yet still serious, note Senator Obama commented that when he returns to Kenya in 10, or five years, he hopes he will not hear the same comments about KANU and its failure to reform. Kenyatta then challenged the Senator to publicly identify him as dishonest if he failed to remain on the reform track, stating that it is Kenya's true friends who will tell them when they are naked.

Comment

¶12. (C) Kenyatta's statement affirming that KANU and LDP would join forces to challenge the newly-created pro-Kibaki Narc-Kenya party through ODM lays to rest much speculation about KANU's political future. Despite resistance to such an alliance by former President Moi and members of the KANU old guard, this decision to join ranks may indicate that Kenyatta is "coming into his own" and accepting the political realities of the day. The recent defeat of KANU by Narc-Kenya in its traditional strongholds in the July by-election underscores the need for opposition parties to form an alliance. It should also be noted that many Kenyans who suffered various abuses under KANU government will never be persuaded to vote for the party, but may be willing to support a coalition entity of which KANU is a member. Kenyatta's pronounced support for nationalism over tribal affiliations is laudable. KANU is indeed the most "national" of Kenya's parties. However, the majority of Kenyans will continue to view politics through an ethnic lens unless offered a more attractive alternative. End Comment.

¶13. (U) CODEL Obama has cleared this message.
RANNEBERGER